

The valley of prosperity!

THE IDEAL blend of strong cultural values, production of cash crops, horticulture and the rural marketing linkage has helped people in Rawai valley to stick to their roots, finds out Anupam Trivedi

**MIGRATION
FROM
HILLS**

PART-6

Even as many parts of the rural Uttarakhand experiences mass migration; the Rawai valley in Garhwal hills has an altogether different story to tell.

The beautiful valley, comprising Naugaon, Purola and Barkot blocks, is synonymous with prosperity. The ideal blend of strong cultural values, production of cash crops, horticulture and the rural marketing linkage has helped people to stick to their roots.

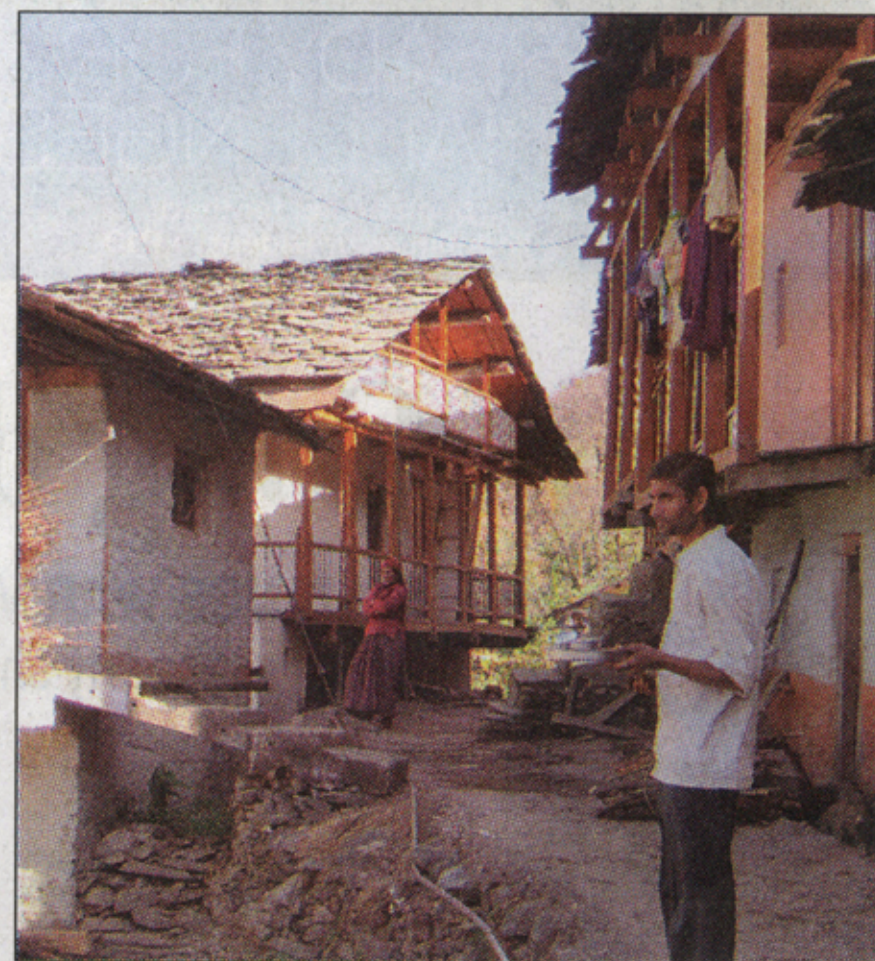
"Why should we leave home when we enjoy quality life here?" asks Fakir Singh, 42, of Naini village, some 180 kilometres from the state capital. Fakir grows cash crops like tomato, potato, capsicum, French bean, pear and malta, apart from millets and soyabean. "I earned nearly ₹ 45,000 by selling only tomatoes in one season," he reveals.

Jagmohan Singh, president of Rawai Valley Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Federation says the two factors have played important role in bringing prosperity to the region. "Post 2001, federations were formed that helped farmers in a big way. Secondly, youths are associated with farming and that gives us an edge."

Himalayan Action Research Centre (HARC), an autonomous voluntary organisation is behind the strong agronomics in this region. Singh says HARC formed federations and linked it with direct marketing. As per Singh, 15% production of vegetables goes to Delhi-based Mother Dairy Federation and the rest goes to markets in Dehradun, western Uttar Pradesh and Haridwar.

Figures available with HARC suggest the Naugaon and Purola federations sold 1.56 lakh kilogram tomatoes to the Mother Dairy in July 2011. Similarly, 48,000 kgs tomato were shipped to Vikasnagar market.

HARC has also been promoting floriculture in the val-



ley. "Floriculture is new to us and I am getting good returns," beams Rajesh, 39, from Naini village. Data shows Dhari Kafnol Federation (especially from Bajladi and Pamadi village) produced 500 kgs chrysanthemum species of flowers last year. Similarly, Naugaon Federation (especially from Naini and Mulana village) produced around 1,000 kgs chrysanthemum that fetched between ₹40 - ₹ 75 per kg.

As elsewhere, most of the villages in Rawai valley also face lack of irrigation facility and fear of wild animals. "This is an issue but we have found ways to resolve it. For instance, we have made small tanks in which water is stored," Kusum, 28, tells one of the young members of a large joint family in Naini village.

Interestingly, women, too, are actively associated in the marketing and farming. "It took us a lot of time to convince conservative family heads to let women work. Now the scenario has entirely changed, women have their own federation which deals with marketing of ready-made products like pickles, candies and chutneys," shares



■ (Clockwise from top) A woman working in her house in Naini village, traditional houses in Naini, women working in fields, Rajesh in his flower field and a woman in traditional dress in Rawai valley.

HT PHOTOS

Amita Kala associated with HARC.

"Rural Uttarakhand badly needs marketing linkages. We took an initiative in Rawai and it is working perfectly. But, I must also give credit to the villagers who did not quit farming regardless of hardship," asserts Mahendra Kunwar, founder of HARC.

Kunwar says irrigation and

marketing are two major issues that need attention. "Even after spending crores of rupees, irrigation facilities are abysmal in hills. Moreover, the transportation cost is so high that usually farmers play in the hands of middlemen."

However, federations in Rawai have indeed ensured ouster of middlemen. "Middlemen from Saharanpur

and Vikasnagar were literally fighting us when federations were introduced here. They would work as bankers and in return exploit villagers," states Kala. Rawai valley was given the status of other backward class (OBC) region sometime back that promises 27% OBC reservation in government jobs. Amazingly, even this is hardly attracting farmers.

"I have four sons and one of them has applied for the job of constable. It's okay if he gets the job, otherwise he has the option to work in the fields with his brothers," says Roop Singh, 53.

(The six part series on migration concludes today. The series was part of the Inclusive Media Fellowship 2011 to study distress migration from Uttarakhand hills)